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ABSTRACT

Teachers and students need to "repack their suitcases" by revising, or re-envisioning, their metaphors of business, models of communication, conceptual frameworks of interculturalism and internationalism, and molds of professional identity. Popular business communication metaphors, most of which focus on the idea of competition, need to be replaced with dialogic models that depict communication as collaborative, contextual, and constructive. The transmission model of communication should be replaced with metaphors that convey the idea of dialogue and interdependence. Teachers and students of intercultural communication need to establish a framework of concepts to guide them. Basic concepts of a framework include: the ambiguity of cross-cultural signifiers; culture as changing construction; and culture as plurality. Students must construct new professional identities for themselves, not just accept the professional identities of the past. However, college and university curricula often put barriers in the path of students who seek to construct a hybrid, interdisciplinary identity. A curriculum model that fosters global awareness and a knowledge of languages, cultures, and business is offered by Thunderbird, The American Graduate School of International Management in Glendale, Arizona. Key to success in this endeavor will be a new emphasis on language learning, a new understanding of the interdependence in the global socio-economic order and a new spirit of interdisciplinarity at colleges and universities. (RS)

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What Have You Packed in Your Suitcase?

Going International Now and in the Twenty-First Century

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Perhaps the foremost challenge that teachers of business communication face in the 1990s is to bring the intercultural and international to the center of the curriculum. We are aware that today's business environment has become global, and we agree that North American students must be better prepared to work and live in an environment where the intercultural and international are no longer the exception but the everyday. We disagree, however, on the nature of the preparation that our students need and on methods of achieving it. As teachers and scholars of business communication, our response to the challenge of the intercultural should be threefold: first, the putting aside of yesterday's assumptions about business and business communication. Second, the establishing of a conceptual framework for intercultural and international communication; we need a framework that is global as well as localized, deriving from particular contexts. Third, the restructuring of monolithic curricula at our colleges and universities and the promotion of interdisciplinary study: we must break down the structures that segregate academic disciplines and cast students in the prefabricated molds of a 1950s or '60s cultural, socio-economic vision. We need to restructure our curricula in English and professional writing--and in business, science and technology--so that our students can pursue interdisciplinary studies aimed at fostering both a global awareness and a specialized knowledge of languages, cultures, and business practices in other societies. In sum, to use the metaphor of this paper, teachers and students need to empty their suitcases and repack them to meet the demands of global communication in the 21st century.

During the next fifteeen minutes I will give an overview of these challenges, but before I do that I want to elaborate a bit on my choice of paper title. I have chosen the analogy of travel and the metaphor of packing a suitcase because they suggest three important ideas or attitudes toward interculturalism: preparation, openness to change, and a sense of adventure. Perhaps Samual Johnson, when quoting a Spanish proverb about travelers and their way of looking at the world, best expressed the role of preparation in cross-cultural perception and interaction. Johnson

observed: "He, who would bring home the wealth of the Indies, must carry the wealth of the Indies with[in] him" (Newby 15). To "go international" now and in the twenty-first century, we must pack our mental suitcase appropriately; we must be prepared with the appropriate skills and with accurate information. This includes language and cultural skills, knowledge of a specific region and its people, changing business practices and up-to-date information. We must understand that the only constant of interculturalism is change; for although a region's language, culture, and business practices have distinct characteristics and traditions, they evolve just as living creatures evolve and show the same subtle variety and unpredicatility. Teachers and students of business communication need an attitude of openness to and a sense of adventure in the face of this change. Almost all travelers experience both exhilaration and a feeling of being off-balance; but travelers must learn to cope with this ambiguity, uncertainty, and anxiety, for to enter the space of another culture is to set oneself adrift of many of the contexts to which our meaning of the world is anchored. We North Americans love to travel, but we are not particularly adept travelers because, at least in the past, we have expected the people whom we meet to be like us--to speak our language, to think as we think, and to act as we would act. In short, we have been unmotivated to take on the hard labor of learning languages and learning about cultures other than English or North American; we have been ethnocentric in our attitudes toward and interactions with other peoples and in our very notion of what constitutes business.

How can we remedy this? To meet the challenge of global interrelatedness, we need, first, to get rid of intellectual baggage that weighs us down. Specifically in terms of business communication, we need to empty our suitcases of the following:

I. Emptying Our Suitcases (the 4Ms)

1. Metaphors of Communication. We should re-examine our popular business-communication metaphors, most of which focus on the idea of competition and liken business to a sport. This is the case, for example, with the "sell-job" metaphor, perhaps the most popular metaphor of business communication. Here, in the United States and Canada, the ability to sell

anybody anything is often considered the highest praise of a businessperson. But this "sell job" metaphor is inadequate for two reasons: 1) it begins to lose its suitability when taken out of the context of North American cultures and put in an international context, and 2) it is based on a model of communication that privileges monologue over dialogue. In the context of our increasing numbers of business transactions with other countries, say Mexico, for example, the notion of doing a "sell job" on our southern neighbors sounds more like aggression than free trade. Especially in intercultural contexts, business is fundamentally not a "selling," but a constructed understanding, only one aspect of which will be the buying or selling of products and services. Business is above all a relationship, a "bridge-building" between people, shaped by cultural, socioeconomic contexts.

2. Model of Communication. We should reject the sender-receiver--or transmission--model of communication. Based on an analogy between the flow of electrons and the flow of "information," this model fails to represent the rich complexity of human communication. One major weakness of the model is that although it can account for differences between the so-called "sender" and "receiver," it cannot account for a commonality, a sharing. Communication depends on a bond, a bridge, but in the transmission model there are only alternating "serves" and "returns"--like a tennis match--between two sides. Another weaknesses of the model is that it does not account well for either intrasubjective, psychological aspects of comunication or intersubjective aspects. In sum, the sender-receiver or transmission model can depict only the simplest of communications; it begins to fail when extended to any complex situation or to the domain of intercultural communication.

3. Map. Teachers and students of intercultural communication have no accurate maps, or frameworks of concepts, to guide them. Consequently, those notions that we do rely on are often riddled either by stereotypes and blanket generalizations of people and places or by information, collected ten, fifteen or twenty years ago, that is no longer valid. We have adop d The Accidental

Tourist approach to intercultural communication. So, in addition to local knowledge about regions and cultures we need to establish a framework of concepts of intercultural communication.

4. Molds of Professional Identities for Our Students. We need to stop thinking in terms of yesterday's identities and academic specializations, with their compartmentalization of skills and activities. At many U.S. colleges and universities students still major in one subject--such as English or Speech Communication or Business Administration or Engineering or Modern Languages or Sociology. Rarely do they have the option, nor are they encouraged, to combine their courses in significant groupings across disciplines. It seems to me that the crisis at our universities--their slowness to respond to a changing socio-economic order--stems, in part, from this compartmentalization of studies and its consequent deadening of the creative spirit of interdisciplinarity and hybrid identity. To meet the challenge of the twenty-first century, students must construct new professional identities for themselves, not accept the professional identities of the past.

II. Repacking Our Suitcases and Allowing Our Students to Pack Theirs in a Way That Meets the Demands of Today's and Tomorrow's World

In some of my remarks I have already begun to indicate how to repack our suitcases; now let me turn to each of the 4Ms: metaphors, models of communication, maps, and molds of identity.

1. Metaphor of Communication.

In place of the "sell-job" and other competition-based metaphors, we need metaphors that convey the idea of dialogue and interdependence, a sense of people working toward mutually beneficial goals. We need a metaphor that conveys diversity and ties of commonality. We need a metaphor for a global world order.

Here and elsewhere I have proposed the metaphor "ourselves among others," a metaphor that suggests the diversity of readerships in business and professional communication, its diversity of situations and contexts, and the diversity of cultures in today's and tomorrow's global business world (Weiss); this metaphor combines the concepts of collaboration and interdependence, thereby emphasizing relationships between people and the bridging of barriers.

2. Models of Communication. Rather than the mechanistic "sender-receiver model" of communication, we need a dialogic model that depicts communication as collaborative, contextual, and constructive. We need a model that will represent meaning not as a pre-determined message, but as an "ideological bridge" built between speakers during the course of their exchange. We need a model that will interrelate the psychological, cultural, and social aspects of communication.

Let's consider this idea further. Muneo Jay Yoshikawa cites four modes of intercultural exchange: the ethnocentric, the control, the dialectic, and the dialogic. In the ethnocentric mode, communication is one sided, because A [the individual of one culture] perceives B [the individual of another culture] only within the former's frame of reference and thus denies or diminishes B's personal, cultural and social identity. In the control mode, manipulative communication dominates: A perceives B as a "thing or an object for A's purpose. B's cultural uniqueness and differences are recognized, but they are manipulated in order to achieve A's objectives" (Yoshikawa 320). In the dialectical model, the emphasis is on fusion, whether that of synthesis or of sameness; consequently, someone, either A or B or both, lose an aspect of cultural identity in the exchange. Only in the fourth mode, the dialogical mode, do A and B recognize their difference yet "interdependence": "A does not appear in its wholeness in isolation but rather in relationship to B. While A and B are separate and independent, they are simultaneously interdependent" (Yoshikawa 320-21). Such a dialogue can promote mutual respect, cooperation, and understanding.

3. Maps. We need a framework of concepts for intercultural and international communication. Here are four basic concepts of such a framework:

a) the ambiguity of cross-cultural signifiers,

b) culture as a changing construction (not just an inheritance or an acquistion)

c) culture as a plurality (a hybrid mixture of elements of more than one culture)

d) dialogue as the preferable mode of communication between persons of different cultures.

In terms of classroom applications, these concepts figure in the following suggested topics of discussion for a unit on interculturalism in a business communication course:

a. The elusive boundary between the local and the global
(i.e., what is foreign? where is home?)

b. The difference between culture and nation

c. Modes of intercultural exchange and types of misrepresentation and miscommunication

d. Individuals as carriers and constructors of their culture

e. The importance of second-language training and cross-cultural experience.

In establishing and refining our concepts, we will need to work with experts from other fields such as anthropology, sociology, speech communication, and international relations; we will need to compose challenging business-writing case studies that incorporate intercultural and international situations and perspectives. Although I am focusing on concepts in this paper, it is very important to balance concepts with applications in the business communication classroom .

4. Molds: Who will be the business and professional communicators of tomorrow? The most knowledgeable and adept communicators will be a product of interdisciplinarity. The combining of professional identities in new ways that respond to the new necessities of a global

business environment is a process that takes place everyday; unfortunately, our college and university curricula often put barriers in the path of students who seek to construct a hybrid, interdisciplinary identity. We need to make it easier for students to build bridges between curricular structures; at the same time, we need to create different departmental identities for ourselves. For example, rather than an English Department, why not a Department of Languages and Communication? Some universities have adopted this or a similar rubric. Such a department would better bring together opportunities for students to build language skills, cultural knowledge, and communication skills. Within such a large, varied department, there would be many, different, criss-crossing paths that students might follow to construct a professional identity for themselves. We would encourage our student to construct an identity that leads them along paths in other, related areas of study as well, such as business, of course, science and technology, and international relations.

In sum, our colleges and universities need both curricular specialization and interdisciplinarity; we need curricula that draw together several areas of learning so that our students can pursue studies aimed at fostering both a global awareness and a knowledge of languages, cultures, and business in a particular society or societies. Fortunately, some model curricula already exist.

Many of you are familiar with Thunderbird, The American Graudate School of International Management, in Glendale, Arizona, which seeks to integrate three areas: languages, business, and intercultural studies. The latter grouping--intercultural studies--concerns not only theoretical matters but also practical knowledge of a geographic region, a country, and business practices in that region. Thunderbird features programs in Japan, Mexico, Germany, France, the People's Republic of China, Finland, Spain, and Norway, so that its students can experience the challenge of living abroad, a component of higher education that ought to become a requirement in the 21st century.

Thunderbird offers courses in nine languages--Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Portugese, Russian, and Spanish--plus English as a second language; that is to say, it teaches languages infrequently taught at United States' universities. Thunderbird's practice raises an interesting question: does the canon of languages offered at our colleges and universities need to be revised? In a recent article in the French magazine L'Express, entitled "Parlez-vous européen?", the linguist Claude Hagège argues that the European school systems should put more emphasis on Arabic, Chinese, and Russian, for example, rather than on English. Hagège notes that French students are inundated by American culture; what they need, he contends, is a greater appreciation of diversity, which would come through studying a language and culture significantly different from French.

Although Europe is not the United States, a related argument might be made concerning language study here. It seems a feasible goal for North American students in the 21st century to acquire a basic knowledge of three languages: English, either Spanish or French (a second language in some parts of our country), and a non-European language such as Japanese, Chinese, or Arabic. How can this be accomplished? Language training will need to begin at the elementary level and continue through the university level. We will need a wider diffusion of television and radio stations that broadcast in langauges other than English, so that langauge learning can take place beyond the classroom. Because language is the main road to learning about the culture and history of other peoples, we should think of it as central to intercultural and global education in the 21st century.

In summary, to prepare ourselves, and our students, for tomorrow, we need to repack our suitcase by revising, or better, re-envisioning, our metaphors of business, our models of communication, our conceptual framework of interculturalism and internationalism, and our molds of professional identity. The keys to success in this endeavor will be a new emphasis on language learning, a new understanding of our interdependence in the global socio-economic order, and a

new spirit of interdisciplinarity at our colleges and universities, which will in turn engender the construction of new professional identities for our students and for teachers of business communication.

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